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ABSTRACT

The professional growth of teachers and improvement in teaching skills are often the results of skillful use by supervisors of clinical procedures of observation in both inservice workshops and student teaching situations. The observation cycle for improving pupil learning has five stages: (1) pre-observation conference between the student observers and the observed student; (2) actual observation of a student working; (3) review by the observation team; (4) post-observation conference with the student; and (5) analysis of the cycle just completed. The concept of clinical supervision, when adapted for use with children, provides valuable learning experiences. Children can benefit when involved in this orderly cycle of peer observation in such activities as learning center participation, speech making, and discussions. While teachers improve instructional skills in clinical supervision, children can use the same techniques to improve learning skills. (JD)

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Equipping Children With Supervisory Skills

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EQUIPPING CHILDREN WITH SUPERVISORY SKILLS

"Supervision" as a term in professional literature of Education almost always refers to activities carried on by various responsible educators in hope of helping other educators to do a better job in classrooms or counseling centers with children. It sometimes is used to refer to assisting in professional growth of educators with administrative or other non-teaching duties. Invariably, however, reference is to adults, working with adults.

Clinical supervision (Cogan, 1973) is a term that is associated with hands-on, in-the-classroom (or other base of operations), practice-oriented supervision. Some educators, the authors included, feel very strongly that professional growth of educational workers and significant improvement of instructional, counseling, and other direct services is highly dependent upon skillful and frequent use by supervisors of clinical procedures recommended by Cogan (1973), Goldhammer (1969), and a few others.

Because supervision relates to helping and to learning, its repertoires might well be adopted, or more likely adapted, in situations involving younger learners. In fact, this article reports a successful example of such adaptation, and proposes that the notion be tested and demonstrated further.

Value of using supervisory skills with children was discovered as one teacher sought to foster productive study habits for students working in learning centers. In a newly organized school designed to achieve integration - nongradedness, team teaching, and individually guided

education (IGE) - procedures seemed to present difficulties when students were expected to exercise independent study habits. Representing a wide range of academic and social backgrounds, many students were unable to function in self-directed activities required in learning center settings. Problems encountered included such things as proper care of materials, completing work begun, following directions, cooperating with group members, and self-evaluation and record keeping.

One afternoon shortly after dismissal time, toward the end of the first four weeks of school the teacher, attempting to organize for the next day, felt more aware of serious problems existing in her learning area. Reflecting on her own efforts and plans and their results with students, she admitted to herself that her learning environment was not achieving desired goals. A close look at the vacated area, revealed once-efficiently-developed centers, now in a state of dissarray. Filmstrips left in rolls on tables, cards and displays carelessly scattered, bits of unfinished student work seen here and there, and individual record keeping charts left uncompleted. The teacher began to remember other student behavior, and could recall too many uncooperative actions, lack of interest, wasted time, and even actual destructive acts.

Realizing she had exhausted many classroom management and student motivation techniques available to educators, the teacher asked herself, "How can I get my students involved in self improvement?" In seeking an answer to this question she remembered a recent important experience with self-improvement as a teacher, namely participation in a workshop

in clinical supervision. Could clinical supervision be used with children? It might be worth a try, she thought. Why not?

In the training program experienced by the teacher, an elaborate "observation cycle" had been used, five stages of which include:

Observation Cycle for Improving Teaching

1. A pre-observation conference with the teacher to be observed, during which agreements are reached as to features to be especially examined;
2. Actual observation of an episode of "teaching" (based on any one of four major formats: whole class, seminar, small-group, and one-to-one);
3. Review by the observation team, in a private session, of data collected, followed by decisions concerning feedback to be provided the teacher observed;
4. A post-observation supervisory conference with the teacher; and
5. Analysis of the cycle just completed, in terms of (a) how effectively the observation team carried out its assignment, and (b) lessons learned about teaching and how to improve it.

These stages, the teacher thought, could be slightly modified to serve as basis for a new approach to student-teacher relationships.

First, five areas where student improvement seemed necessary were identified: exercising proper care of materials, following directions, completing work begun, cooperating with other center members, and evaluating and keeping records of one's own work. In pursuit of these

improvements, the teacher encouraged students to participate in identifying desirable learning center behavior. This was accomplished by first letting them name positive and negative actions and explain why they thought them to be so. After some discussion of points raised by students, as well as others suggested by the teacher, each student had opportunity to choose specific areas for self-improvement. These were formulated into questions, such as "Do I follow center directions?" "Do I complete assignments?" or "Do I cooperate with other center workers?"

Time was then ripe for children to begin helping each other in reaching newly-clarified goals. The teacher explained to them how they might engage in peer observation processes, and asked them if they would like to participate in an observation cycle game. Working with small groups of five or six at one time, she explained that they could become involved in observation cycles for purposes of learning better work and study habits. "You will pretend you are working in a center in a normal fashion," she told them, "But while you are doing this your observation group will be watching to see how well you achieve your desired goals. Suppose you wished to improve your ability to follow directions and/or record your results, and you wrote these two goals on your pre-observation cycle sheet. Your friends, the observation team you work with, would then pay special attention to your ability to follow directions and record results. After the observation and after your friends review data, they will meet with you and give feedback, that is to say, share results of what they observed. Your team will try to

observe exactly what you do as you attempt to follow directions, then during sharing time you will be able to analyze your own strong or perhaps weak study habits."

Children learned that they needed to plan carefully in order to provide each team member with an appropriate question to be used as a guide during observation time. Stage one (pre-observation conference), although a time consuming step, was valuable in helping children be more aware of both productive learning center behavior and kinds of things to look for as an observer.

Stage two, which for teachers involves actual observation of an episode of "teaching," was altered for children to become observers of an episode of "working in a learning center." The student being observed had opportunity in stage one, to select a session format, either working alone or as a member of a group. It seemed desirable that each student be observed during the semester in both group and individual center activities, and therefore were encouraged to vary formats each time they were observed. If they were to work with a group they were allowed to choose classmates with whom they wished to work. When the format included group work, cooperation with others was usually selected as one of the factors to be observed. The teacher always served as an observation team member and encouraged other observers to record what actually happened, rather than evaluating. They learned to simply state, for example, that the filmstrip was not returned to its container or that a task card had not been completed.

In stage three, during which observers reviewed collected data, the teacher led them in positive discussions of peers by encouraging identification of productive actions. Examples of unproductive actions were presented in form of suggestions. Decisions were made by the group, although with the teacher's help, as to what should be shared with the student who had been observed. When possible, suggestions were made in form of a question to students, such as "Did you feel that you took care of filmstrips properly?", or "Why did you not complete task cards?" This was done in an effort to let students explain actions, and to become more aware of their effects.

Stage four, post-observation conference with the student being observed, often began by allowing each observer to report results of assigned observation tasks. Suggestions for improvement were given, and often discussed by the group. Sometimes these suggestions were presented in question form. For example, if it seemed that a student should be more aware of completing work begun, the question, "Do you feel you were able to complete center activities?" was asked. This gave students opportunity for self-evaluation, and allowed for more self-direction for future study habits. The teacher was always a part of post-observation conferences and made an effort to see that the student being observed received positive and constructive feedback.

Stage five, analysis of the cycle just completed, was successfully utilized as a total learning activity for both observers and observees. Desirable learning center study habits were discussed and

ways for self-improvement were established. As the teacher directed the session, data collecting, observation procedures, reporting techniques, and desirable learning center behaviors were redefined and students were given opportunity to evaluate. By phrasing such questions as "Did you see what happened to the filmstrip when the lesson ended?", or "How did the student organize the answer sheet for effective responding?", the teacher helped students develop more effective observational skills.

Thus, the observation cycle for improving teaching was successfully revised to serve as one for improving pupil learning:

Observation Cycle for Improving (Pupil) Learning

1. A pre-observation conference between student observers and student to be observed, during which agreements are reached as to desirable learning center behavior and plans are made for conducting the observation.
2. The actual observation of a student working, in this case in a learning center based on one of the two major formats, participating in a group or working alone.
3. Review by the student observation team, in a private session, of data collected, followed by decisions concerning feedback to be shared with the observed student.
4. A post-observation conference with the student during which feedback is provided; and
5. Analysis of the cycle just completed, in terms of (a) how effectively the observation team carried out its assignment,

and (b) lessons learned about study habits and how to improve them.

The concept of clinical supervision, conceived to enhance teacher guided self-improvement, when adapted for use with children provides valuable learning experiences. Children can benefit when involved in observation cycles of such activities as: learning center participation, speech making, oral reporting, discussions, listening, following directions, and other normal classroom activities. Whereas teachers improve instructional techniques in clinical supervision, children improve learning skills.

Preparing children to be participants in clinical supervision is closely related to working with teachers with the added aspect of a greater emphasis on developing positive attitudes. Children can learn to observe each other and to use positive, supportive methods which foster the development of wholesome self-images for both observer and observee. Encouraging them to identify possible areas for improvement allows them to be more aware of importance of specific tasks. Children begin to realize that little things - reading directions carefully, keeping accurate records, and learning to concentrate on their own tasks in light of normal activities of a busy classroom - are important aspects of learning. Participation in post observation sessions is an opportunity for them to further identify productive study habits displayed by high achieving peers, and to recognize less productive habits displayed by others.

In summary, participation in observation cycles helps kids learn how to learn. It helps them view learning as a personal, individual, and exciting part of life. The teacher becomes a leader and classroom manager rather than a disciplinarian. As children assume responsibility for their own learning the teacher is more free to work with individuals and small groups.

It seems at least possible that children with a year or more of clinical experience of the sort described might well evolve even more sophisticated ways of providing feedback to each other, and of managing their own educational program. Observation cycles could be conducted in many other kinds of learning settings. Older children might even become capable of serving as helpful critics of adults as well, such as student teacher and even regular professional staff.

References

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